

"The Circumscription of Contemporary Western Writing Thought" and Its Significance: Review of Contemporary Western Writing Thought by Professor Qi Wang

Bihan Chu, Yuhui Jiang

Faculty of Humanities, Dalian University of Technology, Dalian 116024, China; School of Politics and International Relations, East China Normal University, Shanghai 200062, China

ABSTRACT

The book *Comprehensive Review of Contemporary Western Writing Theories Centering on Jean-Luc Nancy* examines Jean-Luc Nancy's ideas on writing within the context of Western cultural thought. It delves deeply into the theoretical origins and philosophical foundations of his thought, focusing on the theoretical connotations, characteristics, and artistic forms of "writing", while fully exploring the academic value of Nancy's writing philosophy. Rather than merely tracing the modern history of writing thought, the book places it within the academic history of writing, exploring the connotation of writing from ancient Greece to the postmodern era. It reveals the trend of writing evolving "from hidden to apparent" and connects writing with sense, the body, art, and literature, centering on "writing." The author, through this survey of writing, presents a comprehensive and multidimensional view of contemporary Western writing and opens up to the infinite possibilities of writing and sense.

KEYWORDS

Jean-Luc Nancy; Writing; Sense; Body; Art

In 1964, Gustav Bergmann, a philosopher from the Vienna Circle, introduced the concept of the "linguistic turn" in his work *Logic and Reality*. He argued that all philosophers of language describe the world through the precise language they use, thereby constituting a linguistic turn. This shift made language the foundational starting point for both ordinary language philosophers and ideal language philosophers in their methodologies. In 1967, Richard Rorty published *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method*, further popularizing the concept. The "linguistic turn" gradually gained widespread recognition and acceptance, marking a significant shift in philosophical focus. Philosophers increasingly began to explore the importance of writing, seeing it not merely as a tool of representation but as an intrinsic dimension of philosophical inquiry. In this sense, the "linguistic turn" challenged traditional views of representation, leading to deeper explorations of fundamental philosophical questions such as "existence" and "sense". This shift had a significant impact on contemporary Western writing research. Since then, Plato's *Phaedrus*, which had regarded writing as a "craft" and a "remedy," had its instrumental status questioned. Writing, traditionally viewed as a mere substitute and imitation of speech, began to be reinterpreted as an entity in its own right, with its unique significance and role in philosophical discourse.

In the field of contemporary French philosophy, the issue of language is an essential theme that cannot be ignored. Attention to language has evolved from modern to postmodern contexts, and the focus on writing has gradually increased. Instrumental writing has been replaced by writing that

proliferates and *differánc*e. Jacques Derrida, through writing, deconstructed the structuralist view of language and text, resisting the entire logocentric tradition: "Before becoming the object of history and historiography, writing opened the field of history and historical evolution, with the former (*Historie* in German) presupposing the latter (*Geschichte*)."¹ (Derrida, 1999: 38) By the late 20th century, works such as Derrida's *Writing and Difference*, Roland Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero*, and Maurice Blanchot's *The Space of Literature* proliferated, increasing discussions about writing. The devalued position of writing in traditional philosophy began to change; writing was gradually understood as a process of generating sense and an infinite openness.

Within this philosophical theoretical background, Jean-Luc Nancy's (hereafter referred to as Nancy) thoughts on writing emerged. Unlike some philosophers who have authored dedicated works on the subject, such as *Writing and Difference*, Nancy did not produce a single comprehensive volume solely focused on writing. Instead, his philosophical thoughts often exist in fragmented language, with his reflections on writing scattered across various philosophical critiques, essays, and other writings. This fragmented approach reflects Nancy's own practice of his philosophy of "openness," where he deliberately eschews rigid structures in favor of exploring ideas fluidly and dynamically. Through his work, Nancy examines the interplay between writing and existence, challenging traditional notions and encouraging a deeper engagement with the multiplicity of sense and interpretation.

Qi Wang's *Comprehensive Review of Contemporary Western Writing Theories Centering on Jean-Luc Nancy* (hereafter referred to as *Comprehensive Review of Contemporary Western Writing Theories*) delves into the devaluation of writing in traditional metaphysics and Derrida's deconstruction of logocentrism, revealing to readers the origins of writing thought within the traditional context. By exploring the theory of sense from multiple dimensions, the book demonstrates the diverse logical starting points of Nancy's writing philosophy. From the perspective of academic history, the author discusses the process of writing thought transitioning from concealment to discovery and then to prominence, highlighting the significant academic value of Nancy's exploration of sense and writing following Derrida, Blanchot, and others.

1 Re-examining Writing from a Cross-Cultural Perspective

The preface of *Comprehensive Review of Contemporary Western Writing Theories* begins by discussing the vertical historical dimension and the horizontal Sino-Western dimension of writing thought. It then mentions Nancy's development of writing into the deeper concept of "excription," exploring its relationship with sense, touch, body, being-with, and community. In her view, Nancy's thoughts on writing "place greater emphasis on the essence of writing—the exposition of sense, more emphasis on the mode of existence of writing's sense—being-with, and more emphasis on the carrier and mechanism of generating writing's sense—the body and touch."² (Wang, 2023: preface 2). This perspective is a central theme that runs throughout the book, influencing its examination of writing thought.

The first part of the book introduces readers to the historical context of writing thought, tracing its development from the concept of substitution to Derrida's notion of *differánc*e. This evolution reflects a shift from the devaluation of writing in traditional metaphysics to Derrida's groundbreaking deconstruction of logocentrism, which challenged the prioritization of spoken over written language. By outlining the historical continuity of writing thought within the philosophical domain, this section provides a critical reflection on traditional notions, thereby laying the foundation for further in-depth discussion and analysis in the subsequent chapters. Through this historical lens, the book invites readers to reconsider the fundamental nature of writing and its role

in shaping human thought and culture.

The writing forms of ancient civilizations were diverse, with cuneiform and hieroglyphics being prominent examples. In Mesopotamia, cuneiform was used to record important information such as commercial transactions and legal documents on clay tablets. These wedge-shaped characters were essential for documenting the economic and legal activities of the time, providing a reliable record that could be referred to when needed. In contrast, Egypt adopted hieroglyphics, which used images to convey concepts and tell stories. Hieroglyphics were employed to express ideas such as mythological tales and legal codes, reflecting the rich cultural and religious life of ancient Egypt. These early writing forms were not merely records of information but also expressions of society and culture, capturing the values and beliefs of their creators. Ancient civilizations preserved written documents through various media, ensuring the transmission of information and providing valuable resources for later researchers.

In Egypt, stone tablets and tomb murals in pharaohs' burial sites served as durable media for preserving written documents. These inscriptions have transmitted ancient Egyptian history, religion, and culture to the present, transcending temporal limitations and allowing us to glimpse the thoughts and lives of ancient people. Writing in ancient societies was closely linked to power and authority. In ancient China, official documents such as plaques and genealogies recorded the ruling class's maintenance of social order. These records underscored the power dynamics and social hierarchy within Chinese society. Similarly, in ancient Greece, during the Athenian democratic period, numerous public records were kept, reflecting the evolution of citizens' power and the functioning of democracy. Writing was thus not only a record of information but also an expression of power dynamics and governance.

Despite the recognition of writing's significance across history and cultures, its role as a tool or instrument cannot be escaped. Writing serves both as a practical means of communication and a powerful symbol of cultural, social, and political expression, encapsulating the dual nature of this fundamental human activity.

Although *Comprehensive Review of Contemporary Western Writing Theories* is titled "Contemporary," the work does not focus directly on contemporary issues. Instead, it outlines the historical trajectory of writing thought within the realm of philosophy, providing a profound academic background for a deeper exploration of Nancy's ideas on writing. This is encapsulated in the theme "From Substitution to Différance." The author briefly mentions the instrumental role of writing as a substitute for speech, a status established since Plato and gradually reinforced throughout the long history of Western philosophy. This perspective remained largely unchallenged until the advent of Derrida's seminal work *Of Grammatology*, which marked a significant challenge to traditional phonocentrism. Derrida proposed that writing is always a process of différance, an ongoing activity of leaving or erasing traces, constantly generating new meanings through rewriting and reconstructing traces. This view undermined the dominant role of speech in the expression of thought, serving as a historical turning point for rethinking the relationship between speech and writing, as well as a fundamental reexamination of sense and modes of expression.

Derrida's deconstructive philosophy unveiled the complex interaction between writing and speech, injecting new vitality into the discourse on writing. This section of the text is not merely a summary of the long history of writing thought; it is a deep academic examination of that history. Through the intense clash of traditional and anti-traditional ideas, and guided by pioneers like Derrida, the philosophical background and positioning of Nancy's writing thought are revealed. This historical continuity provides readers with a clear guide for a deeper understanding of writing thought in the subsequent chapters, offering insights into the evolving discourse on the nature of writing and its role in shaping human understanding.

In the vast ocean of contemporary literary theory, Chinese scholars often face significant

challenges. This phenomenon is driven by the continuous influx of Western literary theory, creating immense pressure that cannot be ignored. At this crossroads, many scholars find themselves in a dilemma: should they conform to the trend by immersing themselves in the acceptance, interpretation, and explication of Western theories, or should they place Chinese literary theory under the lens of Western theory, attempting to achieve theoretical recognition through adaptation and validation? Qi Wang's research takes a unique approach to this issue. She keenly recognizes the difficulties facing contemporary Chinese literary studies and directly traces the roots of these problems to their academic historical background. This starting point infuses her research with new vitality, endowing her scholarly work with a strong sense of relevance to the current era and a profound sense of mission.

Compared to Western philosophical reflections on the instrumental status of writing, Chinese traditional writing studies can be said to be more of a cultural reflection. Researchers often start with the study of Chinese characters, focusing on their forms, phonetics, meanings, and cultural and emotional values. This cognitive model of research treats writing primarily as a tool for representing sense, which somewhat obscures the complex relationships between writing and existence, writing and sense, writing and the body, and writing and art. The study and discussion of contemporary Western writing thought can address these deficiencies by offering different perspectives. The author of *Comprehensive Review of Contemporary Western Writing Theories* recognizes the necessity of mutual reference between Western and Chinese writing traditions. Thus, she deliberately combines the writing thoughts found in Chinese calligraphy aesthetics with those in the Western philosophical tradition, particularly with contemporary Western deconstructive trends. This approach seeks to uncover more profound connotations of the writing concept and aims to correct the biases inherent in Western traditional metaphysics and Chinese classical philosophy regarding the concept of writing.

Qi Wang's research on Nancy's writing thought represents a significant advancement in the domestic study of Nancy's theories. Her work transforms writing thought from merely a discussion about language into a philosophical practice deeply integrated with ontological concepts, emphasizing its always infinitely open nature. In this way, writing constructs a more inclusive and freer generation of philosophical discourse. (Wang, 2023: 67) By exploring the intersection of Chinese and Western thought, Qi Wang's research highlights the potential for writing to transcend cultural boundaries and foster a richer understanding of its role in shaping human experience. This integrative approach not only broadens the scope of writing studies but also contributes to the ongoing dialogue between Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, paving the way for new insights and innovations in the field of writing thought.

2 Linking and Interpreting the Issues of Writing and Sense

"The question of sense is not only the object of philosophical inquiry but also a matter of the value of philosophy itself." (Wang, 2023: 237) With this statement, Qi Wang embarks on a systematic exploration of the theory of sense within the framework of poststructuralism. Her work guides readers through the core issues of writing thought, examining the multifaceted exploration of the limitations and reality of sense. This exploration offers a profound understanding of the diversity inherent in writing thought and reveals its complex context within philosophical speculation.

In contemporary society, it must be acknowledged that the "crisis of sense" has become a profound and thought-provoking phenomenon. This crisis has attracted widespread attention in both philosophy and the social sciences and is considered one of the major challenges faced by individuals today. From a philosophical perspective, the 20th century marked a significant era

characterized by a shift from scientific to humanistic thought and a transition from purely empirical to more human-centered ways of thinking. Postmodern philosophy emerged as a result of this trend, with the issue of “modernity” becoming a focal point of intense debate within this intellectual current. (Chen, 2001: 42-48)

This stage of philosophical development was defined by a questioning and often denial of traditional value systems. Concepts revered as absolute truths since the Enlightenment faced significant challenges in modern times, resulting in epistemological contradictions and widespread confusion. Friedrich Nietzsche famously declared that “God is dead,” (Nietzsche, 2009: 14) signaling the loss of the traditional religious and moral systems’ guiding roles in people’s lives. This nihilistic state left humanity facing infinite uncertainties about existence, leading to a profound loss of sense.

Existentialist philosophers like Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre argued that humanity is confronted with an absurd existence. They advocated for the idea that individuals must freely create their own sense during their existence. However, this autonomy often leads to anxiety and loneliness, as the absence of absolute truths and external guidance leaves individuals adrift in a sea of choices. Within the framework of existentialism, humans are pushed towards the subjective creation of life’s sense, making this construction a challenging endeavor. People begin to doubt the existence of absolute truths and universal morals, finding themselves in a world where traditional anchors of sense no longer hold sway.

The perspectives of modern philosophers converge on a significant trend: in modern society, traditional and universal concepts of sense are increasingly questioned and challenged. This skepticism extends across various domains, including religion, morality, language, and social structures, making the pursuit of sense more complex and diverse. Individuals must navigate a landscape where previously accepted norms are under scrutiny, compelling them to seek personal and often provisional sources of sense. This ongoing exploration reflects the broader philosophical shift towards recognizing the plurality of sense and the necessity for individuals to actively engage in constructing their own interpretations of existence amidst the uncertainties of the contemporary world.

From a sociological perspective, factors such as globalization, technological advancements, and the proliferation of social media have profoundly changed interpersonal communication and social relationships. Traditional social bonds and values have been disrupted, leading individuals to feel uncertain about their place in society, thereby causing confusion and loss of sense. In psychology, the loss of sense is often related to an individual’s psychological state and interpersonal relationships. The fast-paced, high-pressure nature of modern society and the virtualization of relationships make people more prone to feelings of isolation and helplessness. This sense of isolation and helplessness directly affects individuals’ pursuit of life’s sense, causing them to feel confused and disoriented in their search for sense. Lyotard describes contemporary society as a “postmodern condition,” pointing out that “the postmodern world is in this kind of perspective. Most people have lost the very nostalgia for lost narratives. This does not mean that they are destined to descend into barbarism. They avoid this fate because they know that legitimation can only come from their own language practices and communicative interactions.” (Lyotard, 2011: 143) The failure of modernity leads to skepticism towards a single truth narrative, plunging people into a situation of pluralism and relativism. This pluralism causes individuals to question unified, universal senses, making the “loss of sense” a widespread phenomenon.

Clearly, the contemporary “loss of sense” arises from the dual conditions of philosophical crisis and social modernity. Rulun Zhang once pointed out that the methodology of modern philosophical thought is to deal with everything with a theoretical attitude, that is, a cognitive rational attitude; its basic problem model is inevitably “What is it?” rather than “How is it?” It reduces all problems to this — the model problem. However, from the beginning, philosophy has

not pursued the "What is it" in the epistemological sense but has concerned itself with "Why is it" and "How is it." Therefore, under the conditions of modernity, the crisis in philosophy cannot be resolved. (Zhang, 2018: 23-42)

However, for Nancy, the term "sense" has a special significance. Nancy deeply explores the meanings of "sense" beyond "meaning" itself, including "direction" and "sensation." By clearly distinguishing between meaning and signification, he endows sense with an eternal openness toward itself. Nancy argues that the so-called crisis of sense is actually a crisis of meaning, not a nihilism of truth. As long as we and the world still exist, truth will always exist and remain open to us. The philosophical re-questioning of sense is essentially a reopening of the ontological structure of "being-in-common." For this reason, Nancy has reconstructed the ontological relationship of tautology among the world, us and meaning, and put forward two crucial propositions: "we are meaning" and "the world is meaning". In Nancy's theoretical propositions, the reason why we are meaning is because meaning itself is the sharing of existence, and our existence itself is the process of continuous exposure of meaning. Thus, Nancy reconstructs the theory of sense in philosophy and endows it with a positive form of meaning.

In an era where philosophy faces a crisis and the sense gradually fades, writing, as a daily activity, is endowed with a significant philosophical dimension. Within this context, writing transcends its traditional role as merely a physical process involving ink on paper; it becomes a profound inquiry into and response to the essence of existence, allowing sense and sense to emerge. Beyond the literal limitations of the term "writing," it can also be perceived as an external expression, an opening toward the world and sense. Through this process, writing becomes a bridge connecting individuals to the external world, striving to reconstruct a richer and more meaningful reality.

From the precise construction of linguistics to the poetic flow of literature, and extending to the visual feast offered by modern media such as film, writing expresses itself in myriad forms. Each of these forms represents a way of understanding and transcending oneself, others, and the world at large. As Jean-Luc Nancy points out, "Writing bears the task of responding to and being responsible for this world." (Nancy, 1996: 93) It is a means of engaging with the complexities of existence, offering insights and perspectives that illuminate the human condition. By embracing this broader philosophical dimension, writing serves not only as a reflection of our inner thoughts and emotions but also as an active engagement with the challenges and mysteries of life, fostering a deeper connection between individuals and the world around them.

Indeed, when discussing the intricate relationship between sense and writing, it is impossible to bypass Ludwig Wittgenstein's seminal views on language and his theory of meaning. In Wittgenstein's philosophical framework, the understanding of meaning is stratified into three levels: lack of meaning, meaningless, and meaningful. His philosophical approach stands out distinctively in modern philosophical thought. According to his theory, only propositions that correspond to facts in the world are deemed meaningful. Metaphysical propositions, which are unrelated to any experiential facts, are considered "meaningless" or "lack of meaning." Wittgenstein introduced a novel approach to meaning generation: "Meaning is embodied in the 'composites' of signifiers. This composite is purposeless, with each part relating to the other as an 'imprint.' The essence of writing is this imprint." (Cai, 2020: 292) In this context, Wittgenstein's ideas resonate with the thoughts of philosophers like Derrida and Nancy, who also explore the fluid and dynamic nature of meaning.

Moreover, domestic scholars have recognized and contributed to this trend. For instance, Zilin Wu, in his effort to construct the "Pythagorean style," intentionally dialogues Wittgenstein with the traditional Chinese scholar Zhongshu Qian. Although Zilin Wu's research primarily focuses on a traditional Chinese view of writing, he similarly advocates for the openness and externalization of writing: "That is, always observing a thing with an open mind and from as many perspectives as

possible; the process of research and discovery is much more important than any conclusion.” (Wu, 2017: 178-179)

Qi Wang also recognizes that Jean-Luc Nancy not only regards writing as a medium for generating sense but also develops the concept of writing into what he terms “excription.” This concept encompasses sense of outward expansion, blooming, interval, openness, and unsealing. At its core, excription represents the overflow and incompleteness of sense. In *Comprehensive Review of Contemporary Western Writing Theories*, Qi Wang analyzes how Nancy’s concept of “excription” emerged from his analysis of Georges Bataille’s work and responds to Maurice Blanchot’s idea of the “nakedness of writing.” She concludes that excription establishes a direct relationship between humans and the “sense-world,” illustrating how writing transcends mere words to engage with broader existential realities.

Additionally, the externality of excription is reflected in the dimensions of writing’s “body,” “touch,” and “art,” aligning with traditional Chinese views on the relationship between writing and the body. On one hand, ancient Chinese philosophy has always been a “corporeal” philosophy, emphasizing the close relationship between the body and the Dao. As the philosopher Fuzhi Wang said, “The Dao is within the body,” (Wang, 1962: 116) highlighting that Dao exists not only as a theoretical concept but also as an integral part of actual life, especially within the human body. On the other hand, elements emphasized in Chinese calligraphy aesthetics, such as the rhythm of lines and the variation of ink color, are intimately connected to the body’s rhythm and changes. For instance, in cursive and wild cursive calligraphy forms, the fluidity, turns, and variations of lines correspond to the calligrapher’s bodily movements of “pausing,” “walking,” “moving,” and “stillness.”

In this sense, Nancy’s concept of sense in writing opens up a new dimension for rethinking Chinese writing theory. This exploration of the relationship between writing, body, and sense is also a key aspect of *Comprehensive Review of Contemporary Western Writing Theories*.

3 The Connection Between Writing, the Body, and Artistic Issues

The book *Comprehensive Review of Contemporary Western Writing Theories Thought* deliberately avoids overly systematic theoretical constructions and instead maintains the openness of Nancy’s philosophical thought. Since writing signifies an outward expansion and overflow, Qi Wang notes that Nancy chose the concept of the “areality of sense field” as an ontological feature of the body and focused on the sense of touch, a sensory modality long obscured, and developed the dual meanings of “tactile” and “touch,” thereby linking writing with art and literature in a multidimensional relationship. As revealed in the author’s book: “We still need to draw nourishment from other contemporary humanities disciplines. The interconnections between discourse narration, the Other, the body, touch, writing, and so on may be the ‘traces’ sought by all humanities disciplines, including some natural sciences, in this deconstructed world. This is the sense of writing and the fundamental attitude in the theoretical era, postmodernism, and even post-postmodernism. For aesthetics, writing is not just writing.” (Wang, 2023: 38)

The concept of the “body” has always been a significant keyword in contemporary French thought. Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and the Invisible* laid a foundation for contemporary body studies, emphasizing the importance of the body for perception and understanding of space. Here, the body truly establishes its subject status. Merleau-Ponty’s thoughts on Nancy’s concepts of the body and touch provide important philosophical insights.

In 1991, due to health reasons, Nancy underwent heart transplant surgery and published the famous treatise *The Intruder*. “I received another heart,” (Nancy, 2012: 133-138). Nancy’s unique

experience of heart transplantation has influenced his philosophical thinking on the body. From the death of the author to the intimacy of the body, the deconstruction of the mind-body dualism, and the reinterpretation of touch, Qi Wang thoroughly examines the intertwining of Nancy's writing thought with bodily experience, revealing the unique role of the body in writing thought and presenting a new dimension of the connection between writing and the body. Writing is no longer just abstract text but a real existence that carries bodily perception. "All writing is bodily writing; any writing that continuously opens and overflows is an attempt to capture the traces of touch, a life activity where self and other mutually affect each other, a life touch after metaphysics has been deconstructed."

Nancy's concept of the body continues the deconstructive tradition of Derrida and others, revealing the state of suspension of sense while reconstituting the relationship between us, the world, and sense. The body is not merely a physical entity in the traditional meaning but an important manifestation of the "exposition" and "sense" of writing. Nancy's discussions in *Corpus* and *Corpus II* explore the concept of the body. The French word "corpus" represents the body as a multidimensional concept covering various aspects. On one hand, it refers to the body, emphasizing its role in philosophy, highlighting that the body is not just a physical entity but the foundation of subjectivity and sense generation. Nancy challenges traditional notions of the body and highlights the close relationship between the body and language, culture, and society. On the other hand, it signifies the natural and inherent manifestation of things. "Corpus" includes the body, living organisms, and inanimate objects. Nancy also uses "corpus" to describe a collection of language or sense, reflecting his emphasis on the commonality of speech and sense. In some contexts, "corpus" can also refer to a community, intending to show the most authentic state of the body, reducing it to a body with primordial sensory experiences. Thus, from an existential perspective, Nancy concretizes human existence in the body. Similarly, from an existential perspective, Nancy contemplates the relationship between the body and writing. In the process of writing, the body touches other entities outside of itself, enabling the body to be born, and sense is generated through touch. In Nancy's thought, he integrates Merleau-Ponty's body theory with Derrida's writing thought, re-examining the relationships between writing, reading, the body, and touch from an existential perspective.

In the history of aesthetics, sensory phenomena have long been dominated by vision and hearing, with touch being undervalued. In ancient Greece, the philosopher Plato linked vision and hearing with reason, believing that through sight and sound, one could access higher truths and beauty. Aristotle also emphasized the aesthetic value of vision and hearing in *Poetics* and *Metaphysics*, particularly through visual arts (such as sculpture and painting) and auditory arts (such as music and poetry). In the Middle Ages, Christianity profoundly influenced Western aesthetics. Colored glass and religious music in churches were seen as important mediums for approaching the divine. Visual and auditory arts not only occupied a central position in religious rituals but were also endowed with spiritual and moral significance. During the Renaissance, with the revival of classical culture, visual arts saw tremendous development. Artists like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo created numerous classic works through painting and sculpture. In the Baroque period, music became a significant means of expressing emotion and religious devotion, with composers like Bach and Handel creating many immortal works. The Enlightenment emphasized reason and science, and vision became an important tool for scientific research.

Originating from the contemplation of "sense" and connecting with Nancy's body dimension of writing thought, the body continuously exposes itself to contact with other bodies, and he reconsiders this long-neglected sense in aesthetic history—"touch". In his contextual thinking, "touch" has dual senses of "tactile" and "touch", not only referring to "tactile," but Nancy uses "touch" to encompass various sensory perceptions of the body. In Nancy's thought system,

"touch" is given a unique status, not only as a physiological perception but as a fundamental experience of existence. Nancy's concept of touch emphasizes the importance of perception and experience. Touch is not merely a physiological sensation but a sense that transcends the body, involving our relationship with our own existence, others, and the world. In Nancy's view, touch is understood as a common medium connecting the body with itself, others, and the world. "Excription" refers to the sounds and echoes that arise when sense exceeds its intended or inherent scope, pointing to an infinite departure and outreach beyond itself. It is essentially a relation and posture. As a sensory mechanism that can be reduced to fundamental awareness, touch is both an outreach of the body and a logical starting point and mode of sense. (Wang, 2019: 130-140)

How do writing, sense, the world, and touch connect? *Comprehensive Review of Contemporary Western Writing Theories* provides an answer: the openness of touch and the unfinished nature of writing. Nancy uses "sense" as a core hub to reconstruct the four-dimensional existential relationship between touch, writing, and reading. Qi Wang's thinking deepens the understanding of the tactile dimension of writing, the worldliness of sense, and the multidimensionality of life and creation. It can be said that *Comprehensive Review of Contemporary Western Writing Theories* not only highlights the interweaving of writing and touch but also places sense within the entire framework, emphasizing the complex and symbiotic relationship between touch, writing, and reading.

In summary, Nancy's viewpoints provide profound insights into diversified writing and embodied creation, emphasizing the inseparable connection between text and body and enriching our understanding of sense generation and communication. In fact, Nancy's concept of the body also aligns with traditional Chinese views on the body to some extent, offering a new perspective for rethinking classical Chinese philosophy. The "body" and "touch" make a return to the stage. Ancient Chinese philosophy holds that the body is interconnected with the world. The *I Ching*'s notion of "Heaven and Man as One" suggests that the body is not only the starting point for understanding the world but also a medium for interacting with it. Through bodily actions and experiences, people can grasp the sense of the world. The body and mind are not dichotomous but interdependent and mutually constitutive. This view aligns with the Western philosophical tradition of mind-body dualism that Nancy seeks to deconstruct, also emphasizing the unity of body and spirit. Qi Wang's cross-disciplinary discussion and in-depth analysis help readers deeply understand the complex interaction between writing, the body, and touch. Through in-depth exploration of non-reality, intimacy, and touch, writing is no longer merely text generation but a comprehensive experience involving the body, emotions, and philosophy.

As a practical activity, writing, in the author's view, is not just about writing about writing but is integrated into discussions of art, linking the diversity of writing with art, writing with painting, writing with the sublime, and writing with literature, thus expanding the practical dimension of writing thought. Through Nancy's writing thought, *Qi Wang* explores the important position of art in the "sense-world" framework, encompassing tactile, visual, auditory, olfactory, and other senses, while moving beyond traditional phonocentrism, and entering the field of art through "writing," "touch," and "gaze," experiencing Nancy's aesthetic view.

Comprehensive Review of Contemporary Western Writing Theories delves deeply into the thought structure of Nancy's aesthetics. Within Nancy's proposed framework of "post-deconstructionist realism," art retains its representational thread, but its focus shifts from the material reality emphasized by traditional realist aesthetics to an exploration of the sense of existence. For Nancy, sense is plural and does not present itself as a single essence; it arises from the interaction between individual existents and the world and others, emerging in the perception of difference. Therefore, Nancy views art not merely as a representation of things, but as "disconnected from things". (Nancy, 2005: 30) Art opens up within sense and remains open, continuously generating. Nancy points out that "the practice of form is only effective when it reaches towards something like excess

or abundance... if form cannot touch its own limits and thus open up to the invisible itself, it cannot achieve this" (Nancy, 2016: 117). In *The Singular Plural*, the term "singulier" serves both as an adjective and a noun. As an adjective, it translates to "individual" or "unique" in Chinese, while as a noun, it specifically refers to "singular" or "individual." In contrast, "pluriel" encompasses both plural and diversity, where plural denotes the repetition of the same thing, and diversity highlights the differences between things. In Nancy's thought, the seemingly incompatible terms "singular" and "plural" can coexist because Nancy argues that the uniqueness of existence contains rich diversity, stemming from the infinite openness of sense. This openness does not imply a loss of independence but occurs on the basis of maintaining each entity's independence. This is what Nancy reveals as "the essence of art as diversity."

As literature is the art form most closely associated with writing, what relationship does Nancy's writing thought have with literature? In the final chapter of *Comprehensive Review of Contemporary Western Writing Theories*, the author provides an answer. Two distinctive novels are selected: Gustave Flaubert's Christian novel *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* and James Joyce's obscure masterpiece *Finnegans Wake* to illustrate the subtle relationship between writing and literature, and how these relationships align with Nancy's writing philosophy.

Under Nancy's philosophical perspective, the image is no longer merely a surface presentation but is closely linked to deeper issues such as sense and existence. By exploring the empty essence of temptation, the author guides the reader to think about the role of imagery in literary creation and how it complements and dialogues with writing. The author further explores Flaubert's rejection of the sacred mode of writing temptation. This view aligns with Nancy's understanding of the diversity of existence, where existence is not fixed but is full of change and diversity. By rejecting the writing mode of temptation, Flaubert broke the constraints of traditional literature and opened new avenues for modern writing. This analysis not only showcases Flaubert's literary talent but also highlights the unique value of writing thought in literary criticism. "The Paradox of Temptation—The Beginning of Modern Writing" summarizes and elevates the chapter's content. By revealing the paradoxical nature of temptation, the author further emphasizes the complexity and challenges of modern writing. This paradox is present not only in Flaubert's works but also throughout the development of modern literature. In Nancy's philosophical perspective, this paradox becomes an essential feature of modern writing, providing a new way to understand modern literature.

Analyzing Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (hereinafter referred to as *Wake*) from the perspective of writing and media is unprecedented. The cyclical view of history embedded in Joyce's work parallels Nancy's exploration of the sense of existence: "A cycle is not closed, not an end, not a completion, nor a termination, but a form of proliferation, overflow, and openness". Through the analysis of media metaphors, the author reveals how Joyce, through his unique literary techniques, tightly weaves together history and reality, tradition and innovation, forming a unique aesthetic experience. Beyond the surface textual content, Qi Wang also recognizes that the transformation of archetypes and clichés in *Wake* holds a certain theoretical significance in text creation and novel innovation. Moreover, discussing this book from the perspective of media provides new avenues for rethinking the "end of art" theory by figures like Hegel, Arthur C. Danto, and J. Hillis Miller's "end of literature" theory. Qi Wang, using McLuhan's "anti-environment" concept as an entry point, highlights how Joyce's use of "environmental whimper" and "thunder" precisely showcases the "anti-environment" after social change: "The whimper is the sound of de-territorialization against the 'unchanged' as the 'anti-environment' is about to be born; thunder is the shock experience brought to people by being thrown into the new environment as the 'change' of the 'anti-environment.'" This actually describes the human perception process of the "anti-environment". Through literary expression, Joyce gives respect to literature and art, expressing a positive literary view: literature will not end but rather move towards innovation. On a deeper level, he expresses a

profound concern for the existential dilemma of humanity and a noble respect for actively constructing a richer spiritual future for humanity. Following Nancy's philosophical thought, Qi Wang's detailed interpretation and analysis of the two literary works not only demonstrates the literary value of these works but also provides us with a new way of understanding literature and philosophy, expanding our understanding of the world and sense.

According to researcher Ian James, "Nancy's philosophy emerges and develops through multiple engagements with other thinkers. It can be said that Nancy's philosophical thought extends throughout the entire intellectual community. Nancy's philosophical path is closely related to those of other figures in French literary-philosophy, such as Blanchot, Bataille, Levinas, Derrida, and Deleuze" (James, 2006: 6-7). Therefore, in Nancy's philosophical reflections, one can hear the thoughts of many thinkers. However, it is undeniable that Nancy maintains his own distinctiveness in his thoughts on sense, existence, writing, Christian theology, and community, while continually expanding and opening up.

Comprehensive Review of Contemporary Western Writing Theories chooses Nancy as the focal point to examine contemporary Western writing thought. Qi Wang enables readers to see that this book is a successful exploratory practice of Western writing thought. It does not stop at merely discussing writing in isolation but breaks through the so-called closed and self-sufficient boundaries of writing and text, simultaneously considering both the historical dimension of writing and the horizontal dimension of East and West. She starts from fundamental philosophical questions, seeking origin and sense, and regards writing as an essential medium for generating sense. Ultimately, her aim is to provide references for writing and artistic practices in the Chinese context from Western writing thought, thereby extending into the body, touch, literature, and art. Qi Wang views writing as a dynamic practice, akin to the growth of a rhizome. She believes that the reading, interpretation, and insight into writing are infinitely open to others, differences, and future possibilities. As Steven Roger Fischer writes in *A History of Writing*, "Man will eventually decay, the flesh will return to the earth; his kin will turn to dust. Only writing preserves it eternally in memory" (Steven, 2012: 284).

About the Author

Bihan Chu (2000-), female, from Jinzhou in Liaoning, Bachelor's degree in Literature. Research Direction: Comparative Studies of Chinese and Western literary Theory.

References

- [1] Bergmann G. (1964). *Logic and reality*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- [2] Rorty R E. (1967). *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- [3] Derrida, J (1999). *Of Grammatology*. trans, Jiatang Wang. Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing Press.
- [4] Wang, Q. (2023). *Comprehensive Review of Contemporary Western Writing Theories Centering on Jean-Luc Nancy*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Gongshang University Press.
- [5] Chen, JM. (2001). The Rise of Humanistic Thought and Its Logical Thinking: Reflections on Western Philosophy in the 20th Century. *Journal of Xiamen University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*.
- [6] Nietzsche, FW. (2009). *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. trans, Zhouxing Sun, Shanghai: Shanghai People Press.
- [7] Lyotard, J.F. (2011). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. trans, Che Jinshan, Nanjing: Nanjing University Press.
- [8] Zhang, RL. (2018). *The Crisis of Western Modernity and Philosophy*. Chinese Social Sciences.
- [9] Nancy, J. (1996). *The muses*. New York: Stanford University Press.
- [10] Cai, XY. (2020). *Misalignment and Generation: Reflections on the Source of sense by Derrida and Wittgenstein*. Beijing: Commercial press.
- [11] Wu, ZL. (2017). The Pythagorean Style "- A Dialogue between Wittgenstein and Qian Zhongshu. *Journal of Tsinghua*

University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition).

[12] Wang, FZ. (1962). *Shang Shu Yin Yi*. Beijing: Zhong Hua Book Company.

[13] Nancy, JL. (2012). *Intruder*. Guo Jianling, Dongwu Academic.

[14] Wang, Q. (2019). Excription and Touch: Jean Luc Nancy's Discourse on the sense of Writing. *Journal of Southwest University* (Social Sciences Edition).

[15] Nancy JL. (2005) *The ground of the image*. FORT J, New York: Fordham University Press.

[16] Nancy, JL. (2016). *The pleasure of sketching*. trans, Guangji Wei, Zhengzhou: Henan University Press.

[17] James, I (2006). *The fragmentary demand*. New York: Stanford University Press.

[18] Steven, RF. (2012). *A History of Writing*. Beijing: Central Compilation and Translation Press.